

Program Evaluation: Montana Environmental Public Health Tracking Project

This report presents an evaluation of the Montana Environmental Public Health Tracking (MEPHT, or Montana EPHT) project. This is a formative evaluation; its primary aim is to provide an assessment of the program during its development or improvement.

Scope and Purpose

The primary focus of this evaluation is on various training and related planning activities as they increased capacity toward development of an integrated environmental public health tracking and surveillance network. A cross-section of collaborators was interviewed to assess progress.

The Montana EPHT project is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program. That program set forth the EPHT main purposes. First, develop plans and components of a standards-based, coordinated, and integrated environmental public health tracking (surveillance) system at the state and national level that allows linkage and reporting of health effects data with human exposure data and environmental hazard data. Second, increase environmental public health capacity at the local, state, and national level. Finally, the program notice specifies that measurable outcomes of the program will be in alignment with the performance goal for the National Center for Environmental Health to increase the understanding of the relationship between environmental exposures and health effects.

Hal Fossum, Cadence, Inc., was principal investigator. Health System Improvement & Preparedness Bureau chief Bob Moon, MEPHT program director Marjean Magraw and project staff Christine Korhonen participated in the interview design and selection of informants. The consulting team relied on others at Cadence, Inc., to help shape and implement various aspects of the evaluation.

The basis for this report is twenty-three "key informant" interviews conducted in November of 2005. Informants were identified from lists of advisory group members and ad hoc advisers to the program, and were recommended by staff and selected for their representativeness of the scope of project cooperators, including state, local, federal, university, policy, and interest advocacy representatives.

Project purposes identified by its major funding agency include:

- Develop plans and components of an environmental public health tracking system.
- Increase environmental public health capacity.
- Increase understanding of the relationship between environmental exposures and health effects.

Methods

Interviews were conducted by telephone. Informants were contacted in advance by state staff of the project, then by consulting staff to schedule interview times. Interviews typically ran 40 minutes, and ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. (See Appendix A: Informants.)

The main line of questions in the evaluation interview followed the project's 2003 work plan, which included five goals and their associated implementation activities. Questions sought informants' appraisals of activities under each goal. In particular, informants were asked to rate

each goal area as to how activities were (a) focused (i.e., conducted in ways that facilitate good continuing progress); (b) engaging and motivating (helped attract interest and motivate new thinking about environmental public health tracking); (c) developed the right mix of people and partnerships; (d) established promising directions (typically measured by anticipated future involvement in the project by informants); and (e) created significant overall progress toward the goal. Informants were also asked to specify their involvement and familiarity with each program area, and to suggest ideas and advice for future efforts. (See Appendix B: Interview protocol.)

Following each interview, written notes were reviewed and input. The numerical ratings were then analyzed and the comments organized thematically. Some informants asked not to be quoted by name.

Evaluator's comment

As a researcher and evaluator not steeped in this subject, I interviewed people who are. The informants' comments were various, sometimes technical, and always insightful. I determined that the best way to represent their views was in their words. Understanding, reconstructing, editing, and organizing people's comments involved interpretation on my part. I have tried to be faithful to the informants' meaning, but I doubtless got it wrong lots of times. The errors are my responsibility.

Findings in Brief

Statistics and overall evaluations for each goal area are presented in the Report Card on Goal Attainment. (See Table below.) Although the report card relies mainly on the quantitative information, the grades were informed by the overall thrust of the evaluative comments. It should be noted that, overall, the informants were overwhelmingly positive in their assessments of the program. Over 46 percent of all numeric ratings were in the highest category, versus eight percent neutral or below. Only three of the 419 individual ratings scored in the negative range.

Partnership building

This goal highlighted the advisory group and a variety of other partnership building efforts that appear to be consistent with all the major purposes of the federal funding agency. This goal area scored highest on the quantitative measures and showed no overall weakness. Both the general comments on the activities under this goal, and the specific comments (particularly about the advisory group and the community processes) were very positive. Overall, this project area scored a solid "A."

The sense of the informants was that the partnership building activities engaged people through substantive dialogue and remained open to new people and ideas throughout. As for directions and suggestions, the comments variously proposed:

- Focusing increasingly on implementation.
- Continuing to support local efforts.
- Developing tools and strategies for maintaining this energy with a geographically expansive network of partnerships.
- Continuing to seek more engagement from Native American communities; advocacy groups; and certain professional groups.

Assessing and prioritizing needs

This goal area focuses on specific activities to gather information about the state's needs through state and local information gathering projects, prioritizing overall needs, and reporting. This goal, too, appears consistent with all the main purposes of the major funding agency. The sense of the informants was that there has been good progress in these activities, but significant work is yet undone. There is strong commitment to staying engaged with this work. The quantitative measures were high and consistent between the measures. Overall, it scored a "B."

The assessment activities were generally well received, with some reports that the project is significantly shaping their current work. The mix of people involved in the various assessment processes was generally viewed as good and ambitious. Several comments touched on the local community assessment processes. Some of these raised concerns that the latitude given to community partners in conducting the needs assessment resulted in variations in thrust, usefulness, and overall quality of the information. Many others concluded that the benefits to capacity building and development of local partners far outweighed the costs in consistency. Some specifically approved of the planning retreat held in February 2004.

Many acknowledge good progress in this area and see work ahead. Comments about ideas and future directions included:

- Continuing the general assessment processes.
- Focusing now on addressing identified priorities and refining the needs assessment as necessary in specific ways.
- Networking with peer states and form regional alliances for environmental public health tracking.
- Calibrating the surveillance systems to be highly sensitive to potential environmental public health problems.
- Conducting an environmental public health justice assessment in the state.

Training and Public Outreach

This goal area highlights training, presentations, and publications that particularly advanced the understanding and capacity building goals of the major funding agency. Informants reported confidence in the focus and effectiveness of the outreach efforts, with extraordinarily high support for continuing these efforts. High marks in most areas of the program were tempered by lower reviews of the mix of people involved. These measures highlighted a tension over whether the project should be targeting the general public or should continue to focus on specific groups. Overall, this goal area scored an "A."

The outreach materials and efforts were noted for their high quality. The local trainings and conference presentations generated awareness and excitement. These efforts appear to have helped expand the network of professionals who understand and support the project's aims, but were less successful in reaching certain target audiences and the general public. Some suggested that broader partnership may be needed to sustain the outreach efforts' success in the future. Suggested directions included:

- Raising general awareness and developing more media exposure.
- Targeting state and local policy leaders.

- Continuing to reach out to regions and communities.
- Looking for activities that create multiple benefits to program goals.

Internal training and staff development

This program goal and activities concentrate on education and partnership building within DPHHS and other state agencies, and it highlights efforts to improve tracking capacity and link human and environmental data. This program area and the next elicited ratings from a smaller proportion of the informants, but drew comments from more. These activities were rated high for expected future involvement and for their focus and in the moderate range on other measures, including overall progress toward the goal. Overall, it scored a “B.”

The informants stressed the size and complexity of this goal, which involves efforts to actually identify and link datasets. Several comments suggested that public health databases were more problematic than their environmental counterparts in their geographic specificity, and pointed to particular efforts to improve geo-coding in human data. In this light, the project staff were seen as excellent partners in advancing discrete projects to demonstrate environmental public health linkages. Several informants anticipated a need to garner support for the project’s agenda from higher levels of administration. Suggested directions included:

- Advocating internally for environmental public health tracking.
- Consistently seeking support from higher levels of public administration.
- Reinvigorating routine staff trainings and discussions.

Planning data linkages

This program goal and activities focus most specifically on planning for the linkage of relevant databases, so it bears directly on the federal program purpose of developing plans and components of a standards-based environmental public health surveillance system. Respondents viewed this as a complex and critically important area for continued program work. Overall, it scored a “C.”

General comments were mostly supportive of the efforts under this set of project activities. Some pointed out the need for strategic oversight, lest projects to connect databases become unlinked from the overall priorities the group has worked to develop. While it is viewed as a monumental challenge, informants were very supportive of pursuing this program area. It appears that informants understand both the promise and the problems. As for future directions, they suggested:

- It will take long-term financial and administrative support to solve the data linkage challenges.
- Continuing to expand the network of collaborators is important to this goal. Getting private health care “on board” can’t be done on a project-by-project basis.
- Pursuing progress in increments through projects and case studies.

Last words

The informants uniformly expressed admiration, pride and optimism for the project.

Table: Report Card on Goal Attainment, Montana EPHT

Informant ratings of EPHT program efforts		Very Positive	Quite positive	Neutral or below	Total response	Average (5=high)	Grade
Partnership Building	Focused	12	9	1	22	4.52	A
	Engaging/Inspiring	11	10	2	23	4.43	B
	Involved right people	12	10	1	23	4.46	A
	Will continue support	14	6	2	22	4.57	A
	Overall goal met	11	12	0	23	4.52	A
	Total	53%	42%	5%			GPA 4.50 Grade A
Assessing and Prioritizing Needs	Focused	6	12	1	19	4.29	B
	Engaging/Inspiring	7	10	1	18	4.35	B
	Involved right people	7	12	0	19	4.36	B
	Will continue support	12	6	1	19	4.58	A
	Overall goal met	7	12	1	20	4.28	B
	Total	41%	55%	4%			GPA 4.37 Grade B
Public Outreach	Focused	14	7	0	21	4.69	A
	Engaging/Inspiring	9	5	2	16	4.44	A
	Involved right people	6	9	3	18	4.19	C
	Reached right people	5	9	2	16	4.16	C
	Should continue support	16	3	0	19	4.84	A
	Overall goal met	10	10	1	21	4.43	B
	Total	56%	37%	8%			GPA 4.46 Grade A
Internal Training & Development	Focused	4	6	1	11	4.30	B
	Engaging/Inspiring	3	9	1	13	4.15	C
	Involved right people	3	9	1	13	4.12	C
	Will continue support	8	3	1	12	4.54	A
	Overall goal met	4	10	2	16	4.06	C
	Total	34%	57%	9%			GPA 4.23 Grade B
Planning data linkages	Focused	3	1	2	6	4.08	C
	Engaging/Inspiring	2	1	1	4	4.25	B
	Involved right people	2	1	2	5	4.00	C
	Will continue support	5	3	1	9	4.50	A
	Overall goal met	2	6	3	11	3.86	C
	Total	40%	34%	26%			GPA 4.14 Grade C

Notes: Informants (n=23) rated items on a 1-5 likert scale and were allowed to rate in decimals. The "Very Positive" category includes only the highest ranked assessments (i.e., 5). "Quite Positive" includes reports in the second plus any fractional scores between the middle category and the highest. "Neutral or below" includes all others; in all, only three reports were in the negative range. Average scores and "GPAs" are the simple average of the numeric ratings. Letter grades: A > 4.439, B > 4.2, C > 3.8.

Partnership Building

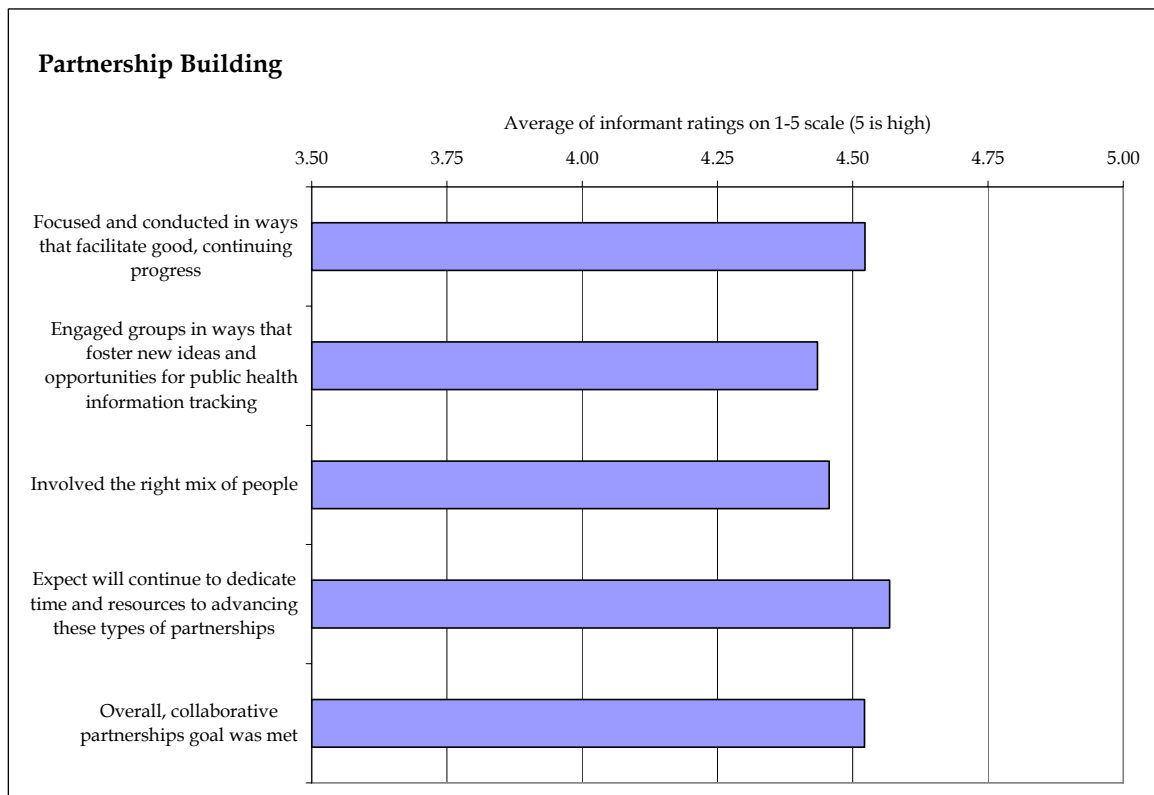
Partnership building efforts are a basic thrust of the Montana EPHT Program's capacity building work and a common experience of nearly all the informants. The activities under this goal include the advisory group, which played an active role in the assessment and prioritization of needs. Activities under this rubric aimed to broaden and deepen the base of understanding of the relationship between environmental exposures and health effects. The heading addresses all the main federal purposes. Responses to this goal are probably the single best gauge of overall perceptions about the program.

Goal: Increase collaborative partnerships and stakeholder involvement in the planning of an EPHT system in Montana. Implementation activities:

- **Advisory group meets quarterly or as needed to gather input for planning**
- **Partner agency meetings**
- **Identify and pursue key partnerships, e.g., State Digital Library, DEQ, EPA, and others**
- **Collaborate across agencies through the Children's Environmental Health Group**

Assessments and main themes

By the numbers, this program area performed very well; it scored an overall grade of "A." Measures in this area were highest, and the most numbers of informants spoke knowledgeably, and positively, about these program activities. (See figure: Partnership Building)



All respondents participated in this section of the evaluation. Remarkably, over half of all reports were in the highest category. The overall strength of the reports gives this the overall highest average of the goals. Informants generally thought the efforts were well focused and conducted, and that they had been effective in building collaborative partnerships for environmental public health tracking. Several informants commented that the work “helps us think beyond our normal scope.” They were impressed with the program’s success in developing a remarkably wide and deep statewide network.

The following headings identify the main themes. Informant comments are summarized below each.

Most general comments about this goal were very positive:

As data managers the project has been very engaging. We have built working and financial relationships to improve the quality of public health data and link it geographically to the available environmental data. • This is important work. It is really important for state and local offices to focus on environmental public health tracking. We will certainly be involved in any next steps. We want to stay on the front lines of this effort. • The group discussions and priority setting activities have been excellent. This program pushes us to think beyond our normal scope. • We’ve come a long way since 2003 in understanding the problems and their complexity. Slowly, surely, we are getting a handle on this. • State agencies have historically been reluctant to forthrightly address questions about which environmental pollutants are causing disease. This process has helped open up the discussion and get agencies thinking about these issues. • It took a long time to figure out who has the information. Once they did, the project was quick to act. • This was a new idea for a lot of people (within DPHHS), to see if we could link environmental and public health data. Lights went on. • Because they are so motivated, it is sometimes difficult to keep the participants focused. • The program generates exciting ideas. • This program has filled a significant gap in environmental public health in Montana. • Overall, the project has done a remarkable job at engaging stakeholders in planning for improved environmental public health tracking.

Specific comments about the advisory group were similar:

The meetings are always well prepared and they are increasingly engaging. • The advisory group’s work is not didactic, but very fluid and engaging. • The meetings are well attended, and there is always good dialogue. This program has made it easy to be involved; they are very flexible about that. • Very productive meetings. • Presentations by the partners generate understanding and ideas; they help us understand our diverse perspectives and how we can work together. • For me, the advisory group is a learning opportunity.

The program works to be inclusive. It is very open to ideas about who should be involved. New ideas about stakeholders, issues, and potential projects are welcomed by the project’s leaders. • This is a tough topic, with multiple interests and complex technical demands. There are no glaring holes in the participant mix. • The more recent meetings, especially, have been well facilitated and effective.

“This program has done a remarkable job of maintaining a high level of engagement. There has been little or no attrition over time. The key players and institutions are there consistently.”

-- Roman Hendrickson, Physician,
Sheridan

This is a working network. • ... a well rounded, high interest, diverse group... • A strong, high power group. • At every meeting, project staff say, “Is there anyone not here that should be?” • A diverse mix of state, university, public health professionals, advocacy, and local people. • The meetings are lively and interesting. Good ideas. • People have stayed engaged. • Serves as a working network to understand what’s going in environmental public health tracking on at many levels. It has helped us link our research efforts with people working on the ground.

Needs and Directions

Move toward implementation:

Most important now is to latch onto specific areas that have been prioritized and pursue them. We need to advance concrete projects, even as we continue to seek and develop new ideas and issues. • Focus more and more closely on one or two priority problems and dedicate resources to them using the existing advisory group and creating others as necessary. • Focus on carrying through on our accomplishments to date. We have made great strides in building a network and assessing needs. Now we need to follow through with projects and demonstrations. We have a

“The program has succeeded in building Montana’s capacity to improve its responsiveness to environmental public health challenges by developing a network that works and pursuing the promise of integrating environmental and public health data. This may not be innovative work, but it is very important. The project has made terrific progress in spreading understanding of environmental public health tracking.”

– Wade Hill, Assistant Professor
Montana State University

solid foundation to build on. • Good case studies and demonstration projects. • Even though the long-term goals are for data linkages on a grand scale, I admire that the program has completed projects, such as the fish-mercury work, that demonstrate accomplishments *now*. We need to continue that way. Small successes along the way are important to showing and keeping momentum. • Don’t worry about the long-term prize, but continue to expose information and the benefits of linkages today, working as we go.

Continue to support local efforts:

The program has given several communities a good support for planning environmental public health tracking. Local offices will need help in implementation pilot projects as well. I hope the program will look toward a significant local pilot program. • Local public health offices run very lean. They fear unfunded mandates that may further stress their already stressed local efforts. It may be difficult to attract them unless we continue to provide support for the local agencies. • The program should continue to offer incentives for local information gathering and implementation efforts. • Local health departments are so poor, they do what they get paid to do. If our priorities include local priorities, that will take us a long way.

Need tools for engagement that enable a geographically expansive network:

As a rural state, many of our stakeholders are dispersed. • Distance is a barrier to participation for busy, far flung people. Need regional meetings, electronic options. • One of the problems in creating teams around the state is the time it takes to travel to Helena. Please look to develop alternative ways of conferencing. • We would like to stay active, but distance is a big barrier to our participation. Many times, we will need to rely on virtual presence and regional meetings. • I

am very interested, but cannot always take a full day to participate in the advisory group. • Participating in this project is taxing for us. It is not easy for us to break away.

On general mix and involvement:

We have struggled to find ways to improve the involvement from Native American communities.

- Involve more environmental health practitioners.
- Need to involve more advocates from outside environmental health and public health circles, such as agriculture groups, that may be most directly challenged by improved environmental public health tracking and linkages.
- Environmental public health tracking is easily confused with an informatics problem. It is important to keep a strong grounding in science. What relationships will be most meaningful, based in science, and actionable?

On the limitations and challenges to building this network:

Native American constituencies have been hard to engage. • More local partners are needed. What are the stumbling blocks to using this information once it is gathered? • Environmental health practitioners, such as sanitarians, are barely represented in the program. This effort is part of a drift I see, away from environmental health toward ecology and health. • Sometimes we seem to lapse into empire building. This is a huge project with lots of competing interests.

Assessing and Prioritizing Needs

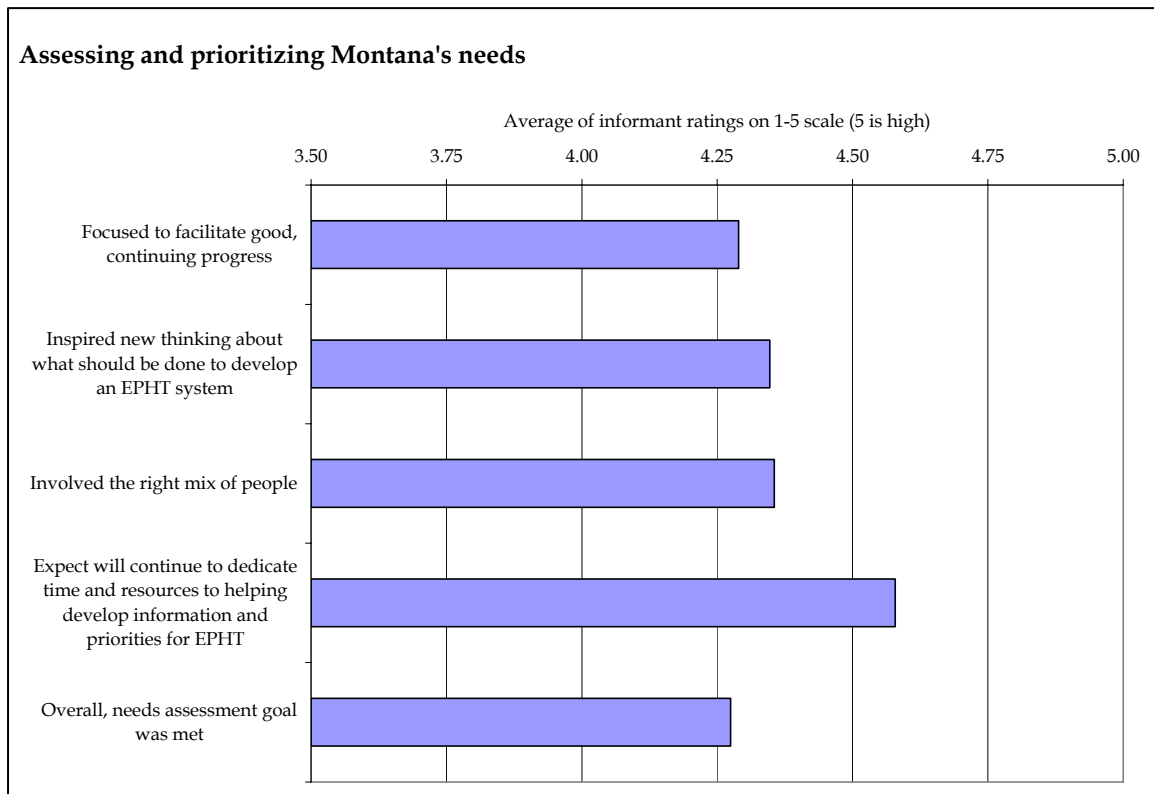
Needs assessment was integral to developing plans and components of an EPHT system. As implemented under this project, the tasks have also strengthened capacity and understanding of the program goals. Activities under this goal were rated by about 80 percent of the informants. This project goal involved four main activities. Statewide information was gathered both through a commissioned statewide survey and from local sites. Local information gathering was achieved through from local community assessment processes that yielded thirteen completed processes. These local efforts operated independently from the state program, but with significant support in the form of guidelines and training. Identified needs were then prioritized by the working group in an intensive, multi-day work session. Finally, in 2005, the project summarized the results of these processes in *Our Montana Environment*.

Goal: Complete a statewide environmental health needs assessment and determine priority environmental health indicators. Implementation activities:

- **Compile data from statewide surveys of public health staff, county commissioners, and extension agents**
- **Compile data from relevant community environmental health needs assessments**
- **Summarize data and prioritize issues important to Montana and publish findings**

Assessments and main themes

By the numbers, this goal area scored quite high, with substantial consistency between the measures. Overall, the project area achieved a “B” grade. The general sense of the informants was that the project had made substantial progress toward the goal, yet there is significant work ahead.



In this area, frictions between comments and informants are somewhat more evident, reflecting the diverse standpoints of the people involved in this growing environmental public health network. For instance, some emphasized a need to continue to gather and assess information, which may be at odds with the preferences of others to implement specific linkage projects. Also, some informants commented that permitting local latitude in the community needs assessments led to diverse approaches that hampered the value of the community-generated products, but on the positive side, the training and support required to conduct these efforts yielded great benefits in local capacity and appetite for environmental public health tracking. The slight ambivalence about overall progress on this goal is somewhat balanced by high expectations for participation in continuing program efforts. Nearly two-thirds of informants rated their expected future engagement in the highest category. (See figure: Assessing and prioritizing Montana's needs.)

In the following, we identify main themes of the comments and present the informant responses in their own words.

The assessment activities were generally well received:

The program has done a good job of helping a very diverse and intelligent group of people to think outside the box. • The assessment efforts reinforced some of the early priority areas of the advisory group, but also raised awareness of some others. For instance, it was reassuring that indoor smoke issues came up in the community needs assessments. • We in public health need to be able to look for antecedents to public health problems. This is not new thinking, but it is certainly motivating. •

Some reported the program is shaping their current work:

I think we are giving people information they can use. The question is, what are they going to do with it? • The program has expanded and unified thinking about environmental public health. • Yes, it has inspired new thinking for our agency. Drinking water is a high priority issue in the state and its communities. We work closely on those issues, but have never before been able to peg its importance so high. • Very engaging. The project is blurring boundaries. • Our program is working to plug into the local needs assessments to try to address issues that have been identified.

The project has helped overcome the “silo effect,” allowing for a more inclusive perception of the problems and possibilities.

– Dana Headapohl, M.D.

The mix of participants was good and ambitious:

On a community by community basis, the mix of people has generally been good. • The mix has been very strong, with some good key agency representation. We need to improve on Native American involvement, especially. • Yes, it reached

out to a good mix, especially with the local work. Also, the right academic people from UM and MSU have been involved. • The quality and variety of the advisory group speaks well to the program's ideas. • Our community assessment pulled together a diverse and talented pool of people. • Yes, definitely, a very strong disciplinary and occupational mix. • State, federal, local well represented. • The interdisciplinary nature of the group helps open eyes. • We know in our community that you must have a good mix of stakeholders or these processes don't work. The state did a very good job of bringing the right people together.

We really need private health care leaders more involved. That is difficult but important. • It seems that the program has made a good effort to include the right mix of people. • There are people you identify as needing to participate who cannot or will not do so. That's the nature of the beast. • There are certainly geographic barriers to participation in advisory group – it's a big state. It's hard for local people to come in regularly.

Future expected participation rated high for many, tempered by money, progress:

Yes, continuing with this group is high on my list of priorities. I know that this effort is not about advancing a preconceived message. Different perspectives are heard and welcomed. • Our continuing involvement depends a lot on the money. Our (local) office, like most others, is on a shoestring budget. It may take significant support to avoid a piecemeal approach. • I will be involved within the limits of my office's resources. • To the extent we need to continue to dedicate time and resources to this, we should. But at some point, we need to quit assessing and get to work. We can now say pretty conclusively what people are concerned about in the state.

While some raised concerns about the local assessment process, many found the local approach valuable:

In our case, the local needs assessment program was inspired. • The advisory group has been motivated by the needs assessment process. The participating local communities have too. • The local assessments shaped how the state thinks about environmental health. They were broader than anticipated. • The local communities did some good work. We are challenged in Montana, by our diverse problems and approaches. Diverse as they were, I saw the county processes generated good ideas and commitment. • The granting process for local needs assessments was innovative. It would have been easier and more linear to train local people in environmental public health work.

Many of the issues identified by local are so locally specific, it challenges how the EPHT can respond. The local priorities are disparate with some commonalities. • Beware developing processes and information that is too locally specific. • Variations between the counties in how they conducted the new assessments were of concern. There was lots of leeway given to communities, and the results were less focused as a consequence. • The community assessments seemed to result in identification of some eccentric issues, including some that were not particularly about environmental public health.

“Absolutely the assessment process stimulated new understanding and initiative in our community.”

– Dan Dennehy
Butte-Silverbow Health Department

“It is important to let the local leaders take the lead on their own assessments. I was concerned about the communities taking different approaches, but it doesn't seem to have hurt. The communities have done well.”

– Gail Gutsche
Legislator, Missoula

“Diverse local approaches led to some spotty quality of community needs assessments, but they were effective in creating progress at the local level.”

The community needs assessments have helped get the word out about the MEPHT project. • That quality of engagement is very worthy as outreach. It has engaged communities in environmental public health tracking and built local capacity and demand for it. • It would be

good to have more local partners present at the advisory group meetings to help identify stumbling blocks to community participation.

Views of the state-level assessment processes were mostly positive:

The state survey work was quite good at going beyond the public health profession to engage local policy leaders, extension agents, and advocacy groups. I can't think of a group that should have been engaged that was not. • I think the state survey was pretty innovative. • The response to the state-wide survey seemed smaller than desired. Did it give a complete picture of the state's needs?

Early in the process, the advisory group may have focused too much on asthma related issues, because some of the partners at the table were actively developing a research program on that topic. I felt, at the beginning, that the advisory group should take in the whole spectrum of needs before considering questions about their priority.

Some specifically approved of the planning retreat held in February 2004:

The overall priority setting process was a very good meeting. All parties felt heard. • The needs assessment process was broad by necessity. It was mission focused. • The February, 2004, strategic planning meeting did go a long way. Montana is a very challenging state; it's hard to conduct a conclusive needs assessment. The state is huge, sparsely populated, with a range of place-specific as well as rural and urban concerns. • We were able to make decisions about priorities, key data and information, and problems. • The issues were comprehensively thought through.

Many overall assessments acknowledge good progress, and work yet to do:

They have done an excellent job to this point. The program has laid a good foundation for additional work. • Montana is a challenging environment for EPH program development. • It is hard to assess whether this goal has been met. • I think they have met their goal. They did a great job on a big project. There's so much more to do. • I think the program is on the right track. • Overall, the program is about where it should be given the amount of time it has had to work. • Did well in assessing environmental public health given the information and data available. • We are at the beginnings of awareness of the needs (for EPHT). I think it will get better, but I don't think it's done yet. The needs assessment will need to continue, and we will have to focus them to get the best results. • This is an ongoing goal. We are doing it. So far, the quality has been very good. • Good work. I view this as a continuing effort. • I think the progress has been very significant. We started with a blank slate and not have identified products. This needs to be an ongoing process.

Good job, but... Montana is a relatively low income, low tech, sparse resource environment. The state is sparsely populated and has diverse environmental public health needs. The state does not have an organized environmental health group at the state level. All these things make the project's work much more difficult.

The assessment work has helped shape how the state thinks about environmental public health – new approaches and ways of thinking. • The environmental public health crisis in Libby has helped bring this topic to the fore. Montana is a big and sparse place. Environmental public health tracking can be a catalyst for better response.

Ideas and Directions

For continuing the assessment processes:

Continue the surveys, but refine their focus to build on the insights that have come out so far. • We should continue the local assessment process. I would recommend doing this in all our counties and reservations. We need a more systematic local approach and similar reporting requirements. • Don't think the state survey is done. State survey should continue and get more response. • More local partners will create more local action using the program. • Presentation of the local needs assessments to the advisory group was helpful. It would be good to keep track of if and how they are using the local needs assessments. I hope the program follows up to see how these efforts lead to local action. • The program is on the right path. We need to seek new ways to attract interest.

Calls to move forward with identified priorities and consider other questions:

Need to revisit needs and priorities on a periodic basis. • Focus on unifying and improving public health data. • Focus further efforts on best payoffs.

We need to be careful in Montana not to be attentive only to what is “statistically significant.” In many rural areas, that standard will miss significant issues. We need to calibrate our EPHT system to be sensitive to small numbers – potential effects.

They need to move toward concrete results in the areas that have been identified. There has been good work done in planning. Now it is time to do what they said they would do, then measure and improve on the work. We have done the most frustrating part.

Other ideas and suggestions:

To what extent is this program networked with other rural states, such as Nevada and Arizona, that have similar conditions?

Consider regional partnerships with neighboring states. Many of these environmental public health concerns don't respect borders. The extent to which we can track and report exposures (e.g., particulates) interstate should be considered.

Don't focus on “statistical significance.” This program needs to be sensitive enough to identify health effects that “fly below the radar” of statistical significance. I hope it can develop to a point where it is used as a tool for seeing potential environmental public health problems that need careful consideration by our epidemiologists and public health professionals.

“We need a comprehensive environmental justice assessment in the state. So far, this has been a top down public health assessment. An environmental justice survey –focusing on Native American, income, rurality, etc. – would help triangulate our information and inform our priorities.” – Wade Hill

The state should invest more program staff in this effort.

Training & Public Outreach

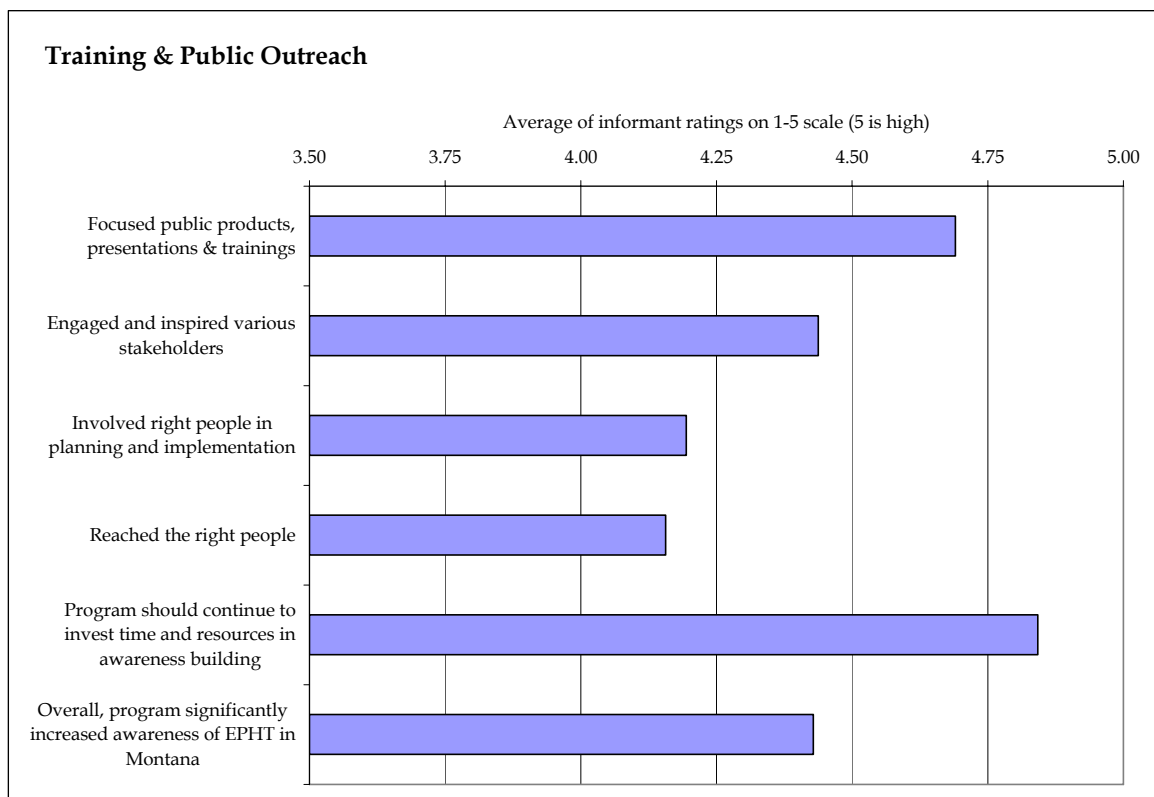
Training and public outreach efforts are integral to increasing understanding of the relationship between environmental exposures and health effects. Public awareness and understanding tasks were used extensively to build capacity for environmental public health tracking. Activities under this goal were rated by over 80 percent of informants. The efforts involved presentations, trainings, and published information through booklet, brochure, newsletter, and electronic media.

Goal: Increase awareness of Environmental Public Health Tracking statewide and increase local infrastructure. Implementation activities:

- **Physician education**
- **Community environmental health needs assessment training**
- **Health association conference presentations**
- **Develop educational materials**

Assessments and main themes

Informant ratings suggest an overall grade of “A” for performance on this goal. In general, informants reported confidence in the focus and effectiveness of the outreach efforts. Support for continuing to pursue this goal was extraordinarily high. These high marks were tempered by lower ratings regarding the mix of people involved and reached by the outreach efforts. (See figure: Training & Public Outreach)



Following are the main themes and comments.

The outreach materials are of high quality:

In my experience, the outreach activities have always generated great attention and excitement. • While there is always an interest group calling for more in any one area, I find these efforts quite well focused overall. • As far as our offices have been involved, these efforts (trainings and web news development) have been well done. • The materials they have prepared are very good. They have made a concerted effort to get out there. • This material is complex. We have been engaged and hung in there.

MEPHT did a terrific job at the Children's Environmental Health Conference. • The Children's Environmental Health Conference seemed pretty good, although second hand smoke seemed to be included only as an afterthought. • We have been strongest in reaching out through conferences, resources, and presentations. • The presentations I have seen are good and clear. • The presentations I've seen have been very well received. The paper publications have been too. The physician trainings have been OK. • Good job addressing the physician's associations.

Great job on the needs assessment document. The question is how they will distribute it. • The newsletter and *Our Montana Environment* are very good. • I saw some conference work and have reviewed much of the published work. In my limited experience, I found the outreach efforts very well focused. • I have paid most attention to the printed materials and found them excellent. • I'm relatively new to this effort, and my familiarity with the outreach efforts is limited. The printed materials I have seen are very good. The publications are focused, professionally done, and they do seem to target particular identified needs.

Local trainings and conference presentations have generated awareness and excitement:

It would have been nice if they could have taken their show on the road more – to reach more communities, tribes, etc. • They have done a very good job with written and web-based products. Also in presenting this information in ways that are exciting to people. • I think the program has done a good job in targeting. It certainly has caught on in our region. You would be hard pressed, now, to find local public health agencies that have not heard something about environmental public health tracking.

The program found a good target audience, and it has been very interested. The summer institute led to local interest and increased demand for this work. We have shared our community assessment information with many other communities as a result of the community trainings and conferences.

People are getting the link between environmental health and public health. People's interests are basic, and they see the fit.

– Jeanne Seifert

Dawson County Health Department

Planning and implementation has been well done, but a bigger team may be needed:

The stakeholders seem to have been involved in outreach efforts. It can be hard in Montana to find the key people who have their finger on the pulse. I think this program has done as well as possible. • In the future, we'll need to get new skills or different people involved. • With Spence's retirement, it has become more difficult to reach the media. • The outreach efforts seem to be centralized. It might be improved by decentralizing it, i.e., relying more on partners.

Training and outreach has been successful in expanding the network:

Some other folks could be involved. They have laid the groundwork and developed a good network, but the realities of the state – its size and diversity – make this a challenging task. • I know they have worked hard and are making progress. They certainly are reaching a lot of people. • The newsletter has been excellent. The web site and the Our Montana Environment have too. They have done lots of presentations. Quite good work. • We have done quite well

with our outreach. We can progress from here. • Local stakeholder groups have been quite well engaged and inspired.

The outreach efforts to date have been helpful in recruiting internal partners. We have been reaching professionally engaged groups – agency, professional, and policy groups.

– Jim Aspevig
Health Alert Network, DPHHS

Very significant progress in this area. Everywhere I've gone, I've seen Marjean Magraw. • Overall, we have been very effective in reaching “the choir.” I don't know if we're reaching the general public, but we are reaching agencies, advocates, locals, state and feds. • Given the funding, I think they are doing a fine on this. • The program has been quite successful in raising awareness at the state agency and legislative levels.

... but less successful in reaching certain target audiences and the general public:

I don't think we have reached the targeted audiences yet. There are lots of potential audiences – e.g., academic, general population. Market research would be worthwhile. • We need to distribute more broadly. Broader range of products, more ways to disseminate. • A lot of this work has been preaching to the choir. I don't know if it goes much beyond that. • Not sure how effective we are in reaching the general public. • Efforts have been made to reach various types of people with different types of materials. But *how* do they reach their targets? • How do we measure general awareness on this subject? • Who are “the right people?” At this stage, we have focused on professional and policy leaders. As capacity is built, we will become more capable of reaching out more to the general public.

One concern we have is that we are not reaching low income people. This group tends to live in the lowest quality homes, so tend to have particular environmental health problems. We need to make sure we can track and target this group. • We have been less effective in reaching marginalized populations, e.g., Native Americans. We should always be concerned with communicating things clearly and in a culturally appropriate way, e.g., fish risks for childbearing aged women; asbestos; indoor air quality. •

We need more contact with physicians. • We need to reach out more to the private medical community. • The idea is to get a grand rounds for physician education.

Need to refine targets:

We are in the right place at the right time. Now we're at a crossroads where we need to get smart about communicating. • My only reservation is that the task is so large. Reaching ALL of Montana is a tall order. This is a complex task and environment. • They need to be clear about who they are targeting. If the general public is not the primary target, how is information getting out? For instance, the materials on fish and contaminants were excellent. How are they being distributed?

All but the media piece appears to be very good. I see that the project has done a good job with outreach overall, but that critical piece of general public awareness campaign is missing. • The project is on the right track, but it needs to reach more people. Develop and take advantage of media opportunities.

We have made good progress on this, but we need to move from very general to very specific information and products. • An ultimate measure of success is whether we are reaching new people – who have not been in the loop. • They have come a long way in some areas. Are we targeting policy and opinion leaders? What role might legislative bodies have in the future? • I am unsure if we are reaching our target audience. • Many people still don't know about (EPHT). We have been good at communicating at the policy and professional levels, but less good on reaching other groups – the general public.

Outreach and education is important:

What we've done is a good basis to start from. I think we can expand on it. If we don't continue to talk about this, environmental public health tracking might easily pass as an issue. • We need communications to keep people engaged in this topic. • Awareness building is the point of the program. • A very promising direction. • This area of the program is developing with good progress. • It will be important for people to understand what this is all about. • We think outreach and awareness building are critical elements of a successful program. • Outreach is a huge piece of this agenda. • The program has done a good job of attempting to reach out.

This subject needs to become part of the general awareness of the state. Web-interactive site on NRIS (i.e., the State Digital Library) for public health data is a good example of a good product. Many local public health departments rely on these tools. • Outreach is absolutely critical to the success of the program. As much as the technical database integration work is, do people understand the “what” and “why” of environmental public health tracking?

The MEPHT Project has been the de facto environmental public health program in the state. In that role, they have done extraordinarily well. They have really built capacity in the state. I have come to use the network they have built.

– Dan Strausbaugh
Agency for Toxic Substances
& Disease Registry (ATSDR)

Program needs to focus on key issues and players, less on educating the general public. I am concerned that too broad a public outreach effort would stretch the program too thin. I feel mixed about this. A huge investment, maybe not.

Ideas and Directions

Raising general awareness seems important:

Suggest more outreach to the general public. People involved with environmental and public health are aware, but less so the general population. • We have definitely met our goals among key agencies. Less so among the general public. My community's process has increased awareness of environmental public health, but maybe less on environmental public health *tracking*. • They have done well, especially in the last year. • They could increase the scope of the outreach efforts to target the general public. Hit more people. • More focus on awareness in the general population.

Seek and develop more media exposure:

Need to be constantly looking for media opportunities – a great way to reach the general public. • TV ads targeting certain audiences. “Where to go if you suspect...” • To date, we have focused on opinion leaders. Assess user groups, targets. Do research. We need to identify end users, do focus groups – Are you interested in this (publication, tool)? Is it useful? • People should get the information and know what to do with it (not have to interpret too much). The state has a great responsibility to present this information in ways that people can understand and act on it.

Target policy leaders:

Be sure the materials are getting to opinion and legislative leaders – including city and county elected officials. • Recommend developing “champions” for the project. Recommend forming a legislative committee or an advocacy subcommittee of the advisory council. • Continue to work

The more the program can show results, the better.

As we see progress, show it, tell it.

– Jim Hill
Montana Digital Library

with legislative groups and key partners, as they have been. Focus on substantive relationships: data sources, policy makers, public health leaders, scientific advisers.

Continue to reach out to regions and communities:

Keep on by funding local community assessment efforts, and by maintaining a solid presence at conferences. • General awareness of environmental public health tracking is much farther along than it was,

but... We must take this local. We need more resources dedicated to local planning and implementation. • Keep strong ties to local departments through programmatic efforts such as the block grants; suggest continuing that program of support. Local health departments are so poor, they do what they get paid to do. If our priorities include local priorities, that will take us a long way. Training is not the first goal, but it is what is necessary to keep local players on board.

Look for activities that create multiple benefits to program goals:

There needs to be a clearly defined way of sustaining the program. • Focus on finding partners. Pick projects where joint activities could also raise awareness. Get double benefits wherever possible. • Continue to do public outreach, especially to physicians’ groups. That is a key information provider and ultimate beneficiary of improved tracking. • They have done a great job under the circumstances. Look for opportunities for program activities that can generate two- or three-fer benefits: advantages to data integration, help flag specific problems, *and* improve general awareness of environmental public health tracking issues.

Internal Training & Development

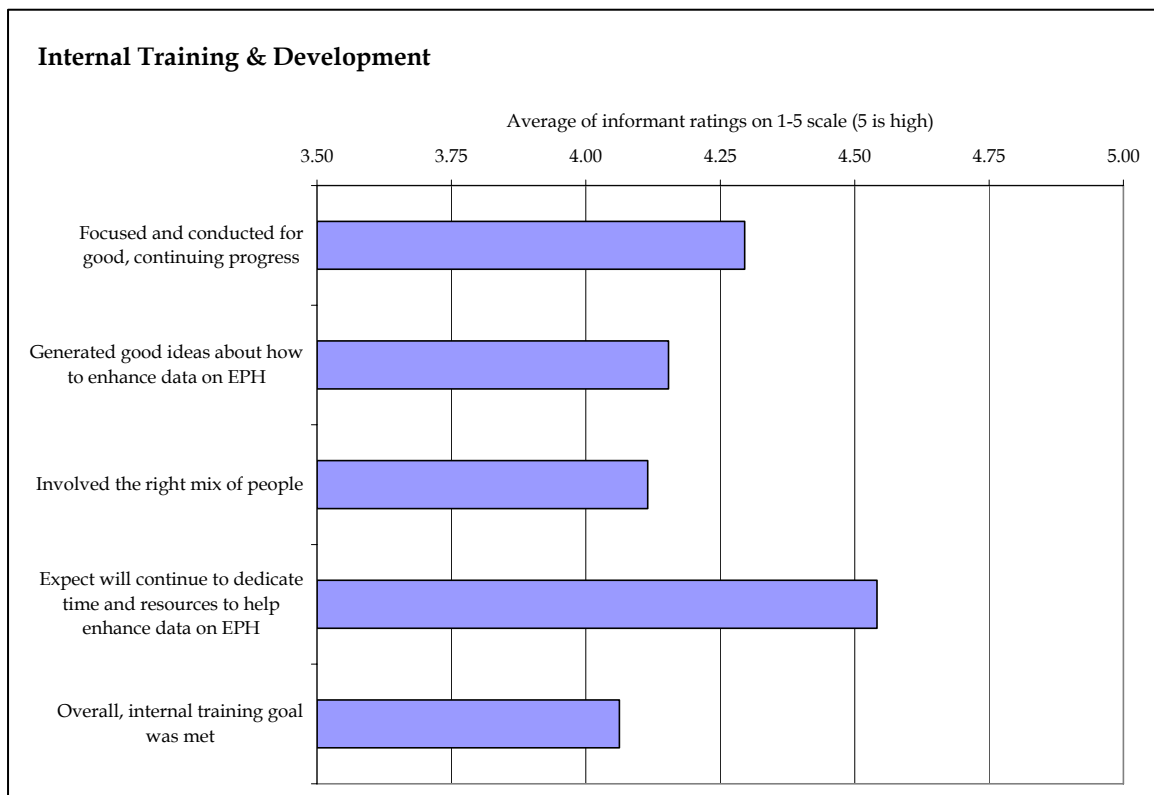
This program area targets education and outreach primarily within closely aligned offices of state government. It highlights efforts to improve surveillance capacity and create the necessary linkages between human and environmental data. As such, this goal addresses the imperative to components of a standards-based, coordinated, and integrated environmental public health surveillance system within the state. One respondent referred to this area as internal marketing. It is a more specialized topic of interest than some of the other goal areas. Just over half of the informants commented in this section.

Goal: Build capacity within Montana DPHHS and other state agencies to develop an EPHT network. Implementation activities:

- **EPHT staff will attend national and regional conferences and participate on EPHT national workgroups**
- **EPHT staff will conduct brownbag workshops for other DPHHS staff in Montana on pilot projects, EPHT, networking, etc.**
- **EPHT staff will meet with DPHHS database owners to increase understanding of the goals and benefits of the tracking project to each related program.**
- **Increase awareness of the benefits of data integration and enhance data quality**

Assessments and main themes

By the numbers, this program area scores a “B.” Expected support for continued involvement in with these activities was the strongest measure, reflecting a solid endorsement of this program area. The general thrust and focus of the efforts also scored relatively high. Lower scores were seen in informant assessments of overall quality of ideas about how to enhance environmental



public health data and linkages; the mix of people involved; and the overall progress toward the goal. (See figure: Internal Training & Development.)

Locating the human-environment nexus – its geography – is often essential in the environmental public health tracking equation. Several comments suggested that in many of the existing public health databases, the geography is missing, eccentric, or too highly aggregated. (Environmental data appears, in general, to be less problematic.) As a consequence, the ability to improve surveillance is often limited by the nature the public health data. Geographic information systems are ever more powerful tools for data linkage, but the problem of being able to spatially link the human with the environmental data looms. Some informants emphasized the need for incremental progress – one project at a time. These reports also suggest close attention be given to prioritizing the key public health problems and developing well-grounded information strategies: implement, monitor, and improve. Others believed support from higher levels of administration is critical.

Following are the main themes and edited comments.

The task is large and complex:

The attempt has been there. It's not done yet. • This is a tough job. Database owners are often hard to work with. Especially on the public health side, the programs that own data are often focused on specific needs. Changing and upgrading standards of data quality is a tough sell to them. • Seems to be well focused and conducted. It's an immense task. • Well done. Pretty well focused. • We have a long way to go in enhancing the data. • This is a great idea, but I have no idea if it's working. They've made a good start at coordination. So often agencies don't talk to each other.

They, MEPHT project staff, have been excellent partners. Very focused. For instance, on the blood-lead program, they helped meet time frames and technical challenges. That project made some converts. It was very effective and garnered new support for environmental public health tracking ideas.

"They understand the depth and breadth of the problem and have seen some success. They are now at a point where they need buy-in from a lot of internal players."

"It's a monumental task."

This goal is important to the overall project's success:

Great job in the circumstances – lean and minimal staffing. There are times I am concerned that the balance of attention in this project stay on science. Advocates are OK, but the science of environmental public health tracking is critical. We want to make sure the questions being pursued here have a sound foundation in science. • This program area will be more and more important in the future, as other program areas progress. • There are too few information technology people on the advisory committee that can help people understand what can and cannot be done.

Formal training activities appear to have been done less frequently recently:

Brownbag workshops – there aren't many of these recently. Seems like a big hiatus. I really enjoyed those. • The brownbags started and stalled. Very busy people, thin resources.

Activities have brought people together in new and helpful ways:

These conversations were not happening before: data, program people, cross departmental discussions. Horizontal and vertical. The data people seem engaged and knowledgeable. • I am eager to see what Northrup-Grummond and NRIS are going to bring forward. We lack a capacity in GIS. Hope we can learn from other areas about public health tracking.

The barriers to data linkage appear to be greatest for public health and human data:

There are especially good people involved on the environmental side. Less so on the public health side. Public health information is laden with confidentiality issues, problematic levels of geographic aggregation and cultural barriers. • I believe the right people are involved. It needs to

Public health information is laden with confidentiality issues, and problematic levels of geographic aggregation and cultural barriers.

be brought in at as wide a level as possible. That's a tall order. • They've done a great job finding agencies in and outside of DPHHS that have good, useful data, e.g., Agriculture Dept., Dept. of Mines, USGS. Take this show on the road. • Within DPHHS, the right mix of people has been involved. • There are some good ideas, like the efforts to geo-code addresses. Folks are contributing resources. The program has made some inroads that way, but there's a hard haul ahead. It's a difficult culture to work in. • We're at a point where we can recognize the problems and fix them.

Initiative and authority:

Database managers, their supervisors, directors are all separate challenges. Need the capacity and authority to act at each level. Environmental public health tracking issues have not risen to the level of the director, who can insist that changes be made, but the process seems to be underway.

On future involvement:

We are most certain to remain involved. It is very important, inter-agency and for the broader population. • Yes, we should be involved. Environmental public health tracking has potential to create to opportunities that we cannot imagine yet. It helps us think about things and tasks in new ways. • We will probably remain involved. We host some kinds of public health data but not others. • Most certain to invest time and resources, especially with regard to supplying data.

Overall assessments are generally positive, but mixed:

The program has done very well. There is a long road ahead, but the effort has been good. • I think the progress has been great. • They need to improve on this. I don't see the effort to train staff. There have been one or two brownbag workshops. The awareness inside DPHHS isn't there. • Based on who is at the table when we meet as an advisory committee, I'd say there area a lot of diverse state folks involved with this program effort.

Needs and Directions

For internal advocacy:

The program could really benefit from better internal advocacy. This is not their fault. For years, state workers have not been permitted to advocate for the programs they manage within their departments. Encourage the upper leadership within DPHHS to focus on developing staff capacity to advocate program needs and ideas. Our people need to be able to make the case for

good ideas. No amount of public awareness and legislative understanding can work if the leadership in the agencies lack the capacity to track and integrate good ideas from within. Better internal advocacy could be invaluable in changing the environment for ideas such as environmental public health tracking.

Sustained, broad, high level support will be needed:

Improve the geography on the public health side. How to tackle this issue? • Achieving this agenda will take more than two staff. • This needs continued focus and lots of hard work. • Maintain good communications, as they have. • Continue to reach out to agency staff at the state and local levels. • They've done a pretty good job. If this becomes a management priority, it could shape many data gathering efforts, especially on public health surveillance. • Need to identify and offer varied options for training. Need goals for internal training, and to target the right people for them. • Increase the brownbag workshops. • Find ways to engage high level *local* administrators. Help them understand the benefits of better unified data.

“The program either needs to expand or the working partnerships among environmental and health folks, data and science folks need to expand. Probably both.”

Planning for Data Linkages

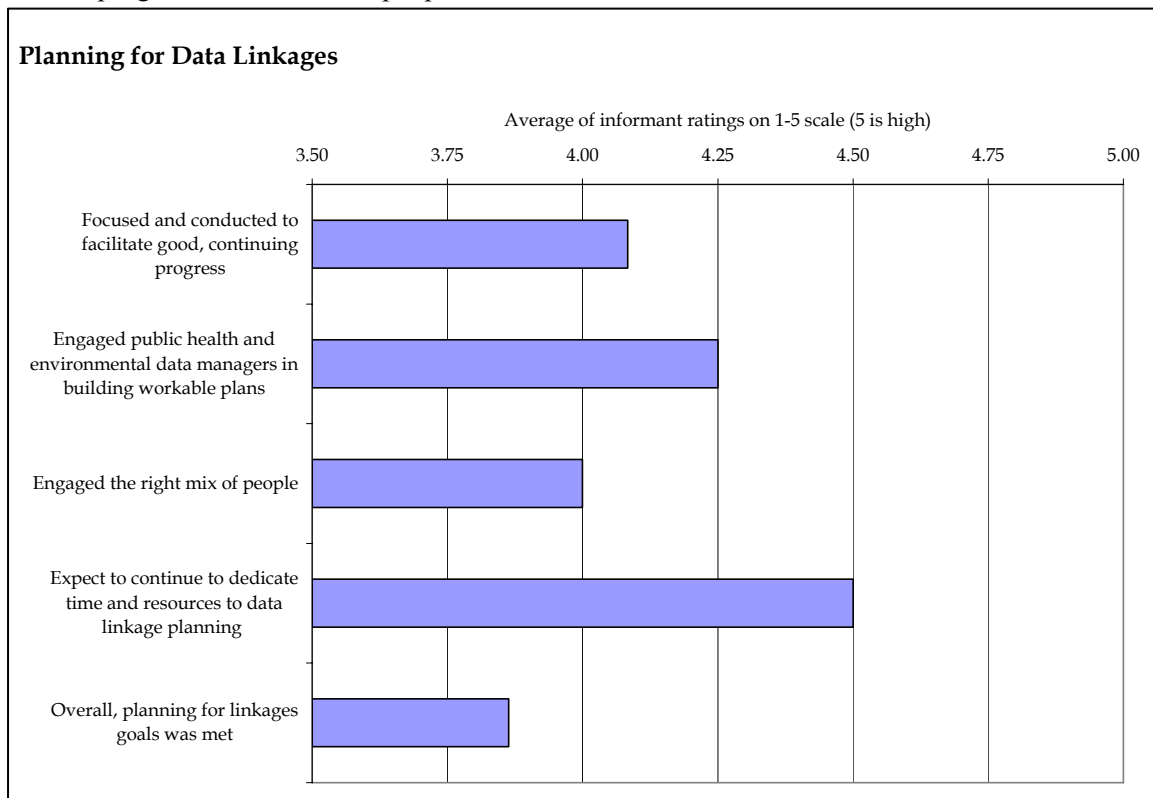
This program area concerns planning activities for linking relevant databases. It bears directly on the federal program goal to develop plans and components of a standards-based, coordinated, and integrated environmental public health tracking (surveillance) system. It is a more specialized topic of interest than some of the other goal areas. Thirty percent of informants commented in this section, although more offered comments.

Goal: Complete a staged plan to link relevant environmental, public health and human exposure databases. Implementation activities:

- **Meet with information technology stakeholders to review an information technology plan leading to a staged approach to implementation**
- **Enhance information technology infrastructure following a staged networking plan**
- **Develop long-range environmental health surveillance plan utilizing the EPHT network**

Assessments and main themes

By the numbers, this program area scored a “C.” About a quarter of all responses scored in the neutral range or lower, the only goal in this evaluation whose ratings reflected significant ambivalence. Despite this, expected continued involvement by informants remained high for this goal, reflecting a solid endorsement of its importance. Informants gave relatively low scores for overall progress and the mix of people involved.



Following are the main themes and comments. This includes statements from several informants who, because of lack of detailed familiarity with the work, declined to rate the activities under this goal.

General comments were mostly supportive of the effort:

We have been involved providing data and will definitely continue to be involved. • I think they drew in the right people – impressive variety and qualifications. Excellent results. • They have done a very good job of drawing in data and combining it in central databases. • They have worked with all the right information technology partners and brought them in as needed. • Good job of initiating the process. • They seem to be working with the right people and are on track. They have pushed the envelope.

This is a monumental job, especially on the public health side. • I am really excited about the future of this program. The benefits will be great.

This has been an excellent partner for our program. They keep their overall goal in mind but are very receptive to relevant technical input. It is one of the few programs in DPHHS charged with an overall focus on public health (vs. a narrow issue focus). • They seem to be bringing data owners to the table, encouraging them, and finding ways to share information and create new data links. • I would like to see us progress in this area because it is one of the main points of the project. The advisory group has tended to split into technical data managers and needs assessment groups. I have been on the needs assessment side. • They have developed a sound base of work at this point. Showing very good progress. Hope we can continue to work together.

They have set the stage for successful efforts. They've done a lot of ground work. I think this will continue to develop and evolve. Don't jump to conclusions. Learn and implement, implement and learn....

Some are impatient to reach the finish line:

It is frustrating to not have public access to this information. I would like to see one database, one website, etc., at which I could look for cancer rates, etc. There needs to be one site that is easy to use and has access to all this information.

Assess and pursue problems of linkage planning:

I'm not sure if the right mix has been involved. Because it is such a complex problem, they need to involve consultants to evaluate databases and discuss staging. I have not seen linkages between the priorities and the data work planning. There seems to be a little breakdown between information technology and health professionals. Key public health indicators/outcomes have not seen database development corresponding to those recommendations. The focus has not been as tight in IT systems. The people in data don't seem to understand health care priorities. • Our future involvement (as a state office) depends on the direction they go.

I think we're slow on this goal. Turf battles and issues of data "ownership" tend to perpetuate technical problems. Political realities may be hampering progress in this area. It is a systemic problem.

Needs and Directions

It will take sustained support to solve the data linkage challenges:

This area seems to be progressing as planned, but this is likely to progress to fruition over multiple grant cycles. Advocacy, including effective internal advocacy at the federal, state, and local levels, will be critical to sustaining this progress. • This is a big challenge. Some areas of the project are doing fantastically well, others not so. If we can keep this up, it may be very successful in 10-15 years. • We need broader participation by MEPHT in agency and GIS efforts. • Get the best program and data sets. In some cases it may require legislative authority to use certain data for environmental public health tracking. • This is going to be a 10 year effort. • The biggest problem is identifying the data available and its status. It is hard to find the silos.

... and a broader network of collaborators:

We have attempted to link air quality, respiratory, and meteorological data, but found that limitations in the information we could get from clinics, health services, and about low income populations limited the inference power. Those types of limitations need to be addressed at another level. (We can't change how private partners work on a project-by-project basis.) Could we reach out to the Montana Hospital Association and others to help on issues like this?

Push for progress in increments through projects and case studies:

Case studies are important, such as the arsenic, asthma studies. You pick an area or issue, develop the data, and see if you can get it done. It involves issue identification, grant seeking, development of a multi-disciplinary team, then the work trying to connect the dots on cause and effect. CDC has done this a lot. • They have done a good job so far. I hope they will continue to push for the databases such as on pesticide utilization, that are politically sensitive.

We need to create data and databases with an eye to their use by general, non-technical people. I noticed a different approach to thinking about this among information technology people and others.

I hope we can better integrate the private medical community in this work and planning. Medical records are a promising direction. • This program is moving in the right direction and has made good progress. When they reach the point where the data can be linked and is made accessible, it will be up to us (the medical community) to use it.

Last Words

At the end of the assessment informants were asked, **Do you have any other comments about any facet of the program that would help me understand your assessment of its strengths and weaknesses?** That question elicited the following comments.

The program is doing a good job at what it set out to do. As it matures, we need to take it to the next level. That will require, internal advocacy advocating the extensive benefits of environmental public health tracking; a long-term orientation toward the project and the financial support to match; and robust local partners. • I am really excited about the future of this program. The benefits will be great. • Overall, I am happy with the way things are going. • This program has tremendous potential and is moving in the right direction. • This is a good bunch of people, dedicated to the effort. Montana has a good chance to show the world what can be done. We're excited to be a part of it.

Marjean Magraw and the staff have done a superior job. I fear that, should the federal funding go for this, the program would go. • This has been one of the best programs to be involved with. It was one of the first to do community assessments. They developed excellent resources and training, and have been able to use the community assessment process in a variety of ways. They did a really nice job of giving resources and skills that will help us do and use linkages between environmental and public health information. • This program has evolved into a very effective project. I was concerned about Mike Spence's retirement. He had institutional power and leverage to get the agency to the table. So much difficult work needs to be done, it's really going to take some significant resources. It will take some pull from the top.

I know at least two places in Montana where local people believe there is some environmental public health problem. The state needs criteria that are highly sensitive, not just "statistically significant." If something comes up that may be a problem, we have an obligation to go look.

This is a great program, well run. It has filled a big gap in environmental public health in the state. • Great program. Great project manager. Extraordinarily good at network building. • Especially since Montana does not have an environmental public health office, this is a great impetus to reintegrate environmental and public health efforts in Montana. • Fund this program. It has made remarkable progress. What they are doing to pull these data sets together is long overdue.

"Marjean Magraw and the staff have done a superior job."

"This program has developed into a very effective project."

"Fund this program. It has made remarkable progress. What they are doing to pull these data sets together is long overdue."

"The program has filled a big gap in environmental public health in the state."

Appendix A

Informants to the MEPHT Project Evaluation¹

Jim Aspevig	Informatics Section Supervisor, PHISB Bureau, DPHHS
Rodney Caldwell	US Geological Survey
Gary Carter	Environmental Health, Indian Health Service
Sib Clack	IDEA Project, Family and Community Health Bureau, DPHHS
Todd Damrow	State Epidemiologist, DPHHS
Dan Dennehy	Butte-Silverbow Health Department
Jim Edgar	Vital Statistics, DPHHS
Tom Ellerhoff	Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Dan Forbes	Operations and Technology Division, Information Systems Bureau, DPHHS
Alex Gorman	Women's Voices for the Earth
Gail Gutsche	Legislator, Missoula
Diana Hammer	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Dana Headapohl, MD	Occupational & Environmental Medicine, St. Patricks Hospital, Missoula
Ann Hedges	Montana Environmental Information Center
Roman Hendrickson, MD	Sheridan
Jim Hill	NRIS, Montana Digital Library
Wade Hill, PhD	College of Nursing, Montana State University
Kammy Johnson, DVM, PhD	Epidemiologist, DPHHS
Judy Murphy	Montana Department of Labor and Industry
Kristin Nei	American Cancer Society, Missoula
Jeanne Seifert	Dawson County Health Department
Dan Strausbaugh	Agency for Toxic Substance Disease Registry, Federal HHS
Diana Vanek	CEHS, Dept. of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Montana

¹ All are located in Montana.

Appendix B

Evaluation Form: Montana Environmental Public Health Tracking Project

Introduction

I am asking you to participate in an evaluation of the Montana Environmental Public Health Tracking Project. Project staff identified you as someone who has been involved with the program. This is a telephone interview, and it takes about 40 minutes. Is now still a good time to do that? (When can we schedule it?)

The work plan includes five goal areas. We want to assess your sense about the goal areas you are familiar with.

The five goal areas are:

1. Building partnerships
2. Assessing Montana's environmental health needs
3. Building awareness
4. Training and engaging key agencies
5. Planning for data linkages

In each goal area I will ask how you have been involved. Then, for each goal I will ask some more detailed questions and ask you to rate achievement on a scale from 1 to 5. In each program area, I will also ask for any ideas about how to improve the program.

I. Confidentiality, release, and involvement

Results of this evaluation will be reported in aggregate form. A list of informants will be included in the report, but individual responses will be kept anonymous. We will, however, use some quotes that reflect main themes. May I have your permission to quote you by name in that way?

☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, assure confidentiality.)

1. To begin, tell me a little about how you have been involved the EPHT program.

Your relationship to this program roles includes

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local agency | <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> State agency | <input type="checkbox"/> Technical, e.g., IT |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Federal agency | <input type="checkbox"/> Policy maker (state or local) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> University | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

2. Regarding the extent of your involvement in this effort since it began in 2003, would you say that you have been involved in the MEPHT effort:

- ☐ Prior to 2003 (Chronic Disease Registry Task Force, preceded EHTP).
- ☐ From the start (since 2003).
- ☐ More recently (since 2004).

Next, we will discuss the program itself. In the following questions, we will be evaluating the program against goals and activities that were developed for the funding agency around September 2004, rather than the more recent strategic planning effort (that effort was done in Feb. 2005).

II. Building Partnerships

One of the major goals of the MEPHT is to build partnerships. Specifically, this goal reads: **“Increase collaborative partnerships and stakeholder involvement in the planning of an EPHT system in Montana.”** This next set of questions focuses on your involvement with and your views of progress on **building partnerships**.

Stated activities include:

- ☐ Advisory group (meets quarterly or more);
- ☐ meet with partner agencies;
- ☐ partner with NRIS – e.g., State Digital Library, DEQ, EPA, and others; and
- ☐ collaboration through Children’s EH group.]

3. Help me understand how you have been involved in this area of the program.

(Prompt: remind of fit from Q1.)

Feedback: So, I understand your role has been as:

- ☐ Partner or cooperator ☐ Advisory ☐ User of the program ☐ Other _____

4. In your experience, have efforts to involve partners (e.g., through advisory group meetings) been focused and conducted in ways that facilitate good, continuing progress? (Focused.)

- ☐ Very well focused ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Not very ☐ Not at all.

Comment (n/a or text):

5. Have they (e.g., the meeting & forums) engaged the groups in ways that foster new ideas and opportunities for public health information tracking? That is, have they helped foster new thinking among participating groups about the value of EPHT? (Engaging & motivating.)

- ☐ Very engaging ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Not very ☐ Not engaging at all.

Comment (n/a or text):

6. Still thinking just about the program’s efforts to build partnerships, has the right mix of people been involved? Have program staff developed a group that can advance this agenda? (Right people involved.)

☐ Very strong mix ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Somewhat ☐ Poor/weak mix.

Comment (n/a or text):

7. In the future, do you expect your organization, office, or agency will continue to dedicate time and resources to advancing these types of partnerships? (Promising directions.)

☐ Most certain to invest time and resources ☐ Probably ☐ Somewhat likely ☐
Involvement will probably be limited ☐ Unlikely to continue to be involved.

Comment (n/a or text):

8. Overall, would you say that this goal has been met – has the program succeeded in significantly involving stakeholders in the planning of an EPHT system in Montana? (Overall)

☐ Great success ☐ Significant ☐ Some success ☐ Could have been better ☐
Mostly unsuccessful

9. What ideas or advice would you give about how to sustain or improve the program's partnership building efforts?

III. Assessing Montana's Needs

Another major goal of the MEPHT is to “**Complete a statewide environmental health needs assessment and determine priority indicators.**” The following questions focus on your involvement with and views about this goal of **assessing Montana's needs**.

Activities include:

- ☐ Compile data from statewide surveys of public health staff, county commissioners and extension agents;
- ☐ compile data from community EH needs assessments (done 13 to date); and
- ☐ summarize data and prioritize issues important to Montana, and publish findings (i.e., “Our Montana Environment” needs assessment).

10. Can you help me understand how you have been involved in this area of the program?

Feedback: So, I understand your role has been as:

- ☐ Partner or cooperator ☐ Advisory ☐ Reader or user ☐ Other _____

11. In your experience, have these program activities been focused in ways that facilitate good, continuing progress? (Focused.)

- ☐ Very well focused and conducted ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Not very ☐ Not at all.

Comment (n/a or text):

12. Have they inspired new thinking about what should be done to develop an EPHT system? (Engaging & motivating.)

- ☐ Very engaging ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Not very ☐ Not engaging at all.

Comment (n/a or text):

13. Has the right mix of people been involved? Have the staff involved stakeholders that can identify and prioritize needs? (Right people involved.)

☐ Very strong mix ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Somewhat ☐ Very poor/weak mix.

Comment (n/a or text):

14. In the future, do you expect your organization or agency will continue to dedicate time and resources to helping develop an environmental public health tracking system? (Promising directions.)

☐ Most certain to invest time and resources ☐ Probably ☐ Somewhat likely ☐ Involvement will probably be limited ☐ Unlikely to continue to be involved.

Comment (n/a or text):

15. Overall, would you say that this goal has been met – has the program succeeded in assessing the state's needs for environmental public health information tracking? (Overall)

☐ Very significant progress ☐ Quite a bit ☐ Neutral ☐ Somewhat ☐ Very limited progress.

Comment (n/a or text):

16. What ideas or advice would you give about how to sustain or improve how the program identifies and prioritizes needs?

IV. Improving awareness through publications, presentations & trainings

A third major goal of the MEPHT is to **“Increase awareness of EPHT statewide.”** The following questions focus on your involvement with and views about this goal of **improving awareness**.

Stated activities under this goal include:

- ☐ Physician education;
- ☐ Community environmental health needs assessment training;
- ☐ Health association conference presentations (e.g., presentations to Montana public Health Association, MT Environmental Health Association, Women’s Environmental Health Conference); and
- ☐ Develop educational materials, e.g., EPHT newsletter, enhance website, or publications such as “Our Montana Environment” a.k.a., the needs assessment document.

17. Can you help me understand how you have been involved in this area of the program?

Feedback: So, I understand your role has been as:

- ☐ Partner or cooperator ☐ Advisory ☐ User of materials ☐ Other _____

18. In your experience, have these products, presentations & trainings been well focused?
(Focused activities.)

- ☐ Very well focused ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Not very ☐ Not at all.

Comment (n/a or text):

19. Have these products presentations & trainings engaged and inspired the various stakeholders?
(Engaging & inspiring activities.)

- ☐ Very engaging ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Not very ☐ Not engaging at all.

Comment (n/a or text):

20. Has the right mix of people been involved in planning and implementation?

☐ Very strong ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Somewhat ☐ Very poor/weak mix.

Comment (n/a or text):

21. Are we reaching the right people? (Right people involved.)

☐ Very strong ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Somewhat ☐ Very poor/weak mix.

Comment (n/a or text):

22. Is this a promising direction for the program? That is, should the program continue to invest time and resources in similar awareness building efforts? (Promise & direction.)

☐ Should definitely invest time and resources ☐ Probably ☐ Neutral ☐ Limited
☐ Definitely not

Comment (n/a or text):

23. Overall, would you say that this goal has been met – has the program succeeded in significantly increasing awareness of an EPHT system in Montana? (Overall)

☐ Very significant progress ☐ Quite a bit ☐ Neutral ☐ Somewhat ☐ Very limited progress.

Comment (n/a or text):

24. What ideas or advice would you give about how to sustain or improve how the program works to improve general awareness?

V. Training & engaging state staff

You may or may not have insights about this next goal, which concerns training and engaging staff of DPHHS and other state agencies. If so, I'd like to ask a similar set of questions; if not, I would simply ask if you have any impressions and recommendations. This goal reads, "**Build capacity within Montana DPHHS and other state agencies to develop an EPHT network.**"

Stated activities include:

- ☐ EPHT staff will attend national and regional conferences and participate on EPHT national workgroups;
- ☐ EPHT staff will conduct brownbag workshops for other DPHHS staff in Montana on pilot projects, EPHT, networking, etc.; and
- ☐ EPHT staff will meet with DPHHS database owners to increase understanding of the goals and benefits of the tracking project to each related program.
- ☐ Increase awareness of the benefits of data integration and enhance data quality.

25. Can you help me understand how you have been involved in this area of the program?

Feedback: So, I understand your role has been as:

- ☐ Partner or cooperator ☐ Advisory ☐ Other _____

26. Do you think these activities been focused and conducted in ways that lead to good, continuing progress? (Focused activities.)

- ☐ Very well focused ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Not very ☐ Not at all.

Comment (n/a or text):

27. Have these activities generated good ideas about how to enhance data on environmental public health? (Engaging & inspiring activities.)

☐ Very engaging ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Not very ☐ Not engaging at all.

Comment (n/a or text):

28. Has the right mix of people been involved? Has the program created a capacity and willingness to develop improved data linkages? (Right people involved.)

☐ Very good mix ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Somewhat ☐ Very poor/weak mix.

Comment (n/a or text):

29. In the future, do you expect your office or agency will continue to dedicate time and resources to help develop an EPHT system? (Promise & direction.)

☐ Most certain to invest time and resources ☐ Probably ☐ Somewhat likely ☐ Involvement will probably be limited ☐ Unlikely to continue to be involved.

Comment (n/a or text):

30. Overall, would you say that this goal has been met – has the program helped train, brief, and enable efforts to build a good environmental health tracking program? (Overall)

☐ Very significant progress ☐ Quite a bit ☐ Neutral ☐ Somewhat ☐ Very limited progress.

Comment (n/a or text):

31. What ideas or advice would you give about how to sustain or improve how the program engages staff in EPHT efforts?

VI. Linking data sets

You may or may not have insights about this next goal, which concerns linking relevant databases. If so, I'd like to ask a similar set of questions; if not, I would simply ask if you have any impressions and recommendations. This goal reads, **“Complete a staged plan to link relevant environmental, public health and human exposure databases.”**

Stated activities include:

- ☐ Meet with information technology stakeholders to review an information technology plan leading to a staged approach to implementation;
- ☐ Enhance information technology infrastructure following a staged networking plan; and
- ☐ Develop long-range environmental health surveillance plan utilizing the EPHT network. (This activity is now in progress and is slated for completion this Dec.-Jan.)

32. Can you help me understand how you have been involved in helping to build data linkages?

Feedback: So, I understand your role has been as:

- ☐ Partner or cooperator ☐ Advisory ☐ User of the program ☐ Other _____

33. In your experience, have these activities been focused and conducted in ways that facilitate good, continuing progress? (Focused activities.)

- ☐ Very well focused and conducted ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Not very ☐ Not at all.

Comment (n/a or text):

34. Have they engaged public health and environmental data managers in building a plan? (Engaging & inspiring activities.)

- ☐ Very engaging ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Not very ☐ Not engaging at all.

Comment (n/a or text):

35. Has the right mix of people been involved? Has the program developed among information managers capacity and willingness to develop workable plan? (Right people involved.)

☐ Very strong mix ☐ Quite ☐ Neutral ☐ Somewhat ☐ Very poor/weak mix.

Comment (n/a or text):

36. In the future, do you expect your office will continue to dedicate time and resources to collaborate with the EPHT program along these lines? (Promise & direction.)

☐ Most certain to invest time and resources ☐ Probably ☐ Somewhat likely ☐ Involvement will probably be limited ☐ Unlikely to continue to be involved.

Comment (n/a or text):

37. Overall, would you say that this goal has been met – has the program set the stage to complete a plan to link environmental health tracking data? (Overall)

☐ Very significant progress ☐ Quite a bit ☐ Neutral ☐ Somewhat ☐ Very limited progress.

Comment (n/a or text):

38. What ideas or advice would you give about how to sustain or improve how the program works to improve technical planning for data integration?

Other comments

39. Do you have any other comments about any facet of the program that would help me understand your assessment of its strengths and weaknesses?

Thank you for your time.

In the coming days, the evaluation team will be developing a written evaluation based on the these interviews. That product will be delivered to program manager Marjean Magraw, and will be included in a report to the federal program.

Would you like to receive a copy of the evaluation report? ☐ yes ☐ no

We appreciate your participation.